

Message Text

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ORIGIN ARA-20

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FM SECSTATE WASHDC

TO AMEMBASSY PANAMA

S E C R E T STATE 168127

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (2 LINES OMMITTED FIRST LINE OF TEXT)

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: CASC, PN, CU (VILLA, JOSE)

SUBJ: STATUS OF THE VILLA CASE

REF: THOMPSON/BLACKEN-HOWARD TELCON

1. ISABEL VILLA, DAUGHTER OF CAPTAIN JOSE VILLA WHO IS STILL AWAITING TRIAL IN PANAMA, CALLED PAN SEVERAL TIMES DURING PAST WEEK TO INQUIRE ABOUT STATUS OF HER FATHER'S CASE. IN ADDITION TO CLAIMING THAT HER FATHER IS SICK AND LOW ON FUNDS IN SANTIAGO, VERAGUAS PROVINCE, MISS VILLA INSISTS THAT PANAMANIAN SOURCE (UNIDENTIFIED) CLOSE TO GENERAL TORRIJOS HAS INFORMED FAMILY CONFIDENTIALLY THAT TORRIJOS IS DELAYING TRIAL AND RELEASE OF CAPTAIN VILLA BECAUSE OF CONCERN THAT DISMISSAL OF CASE WOULD LEAD TO PROBLEMS WITH INSURANCE COMPANY (LLOYDS OF LONDON) REGARDING GOP'S DECISION TO KEEP EXPRESS BOATS WHICH CUBA TURNED OVER TO PANAMA. MISS VILLA CLAIMED THAT INSURANCE COMPANY HAS PAID EXPRESS BOAT OWNERS -- BABUN BROTHERS -- WHO ARE, THEREFORE, NO LONGER INTERESTED IN CAPTAIN'S WELFARE. LLOYDS, HOWEVER, WILL ALLEGEDLY TRY TO RECOVER BOATS OR THEIR VALUE FROM GOP IF PANAMA'S CASE AGAINST VILLA IS NOT UPHELD. OTHER THAN TO TRY AND CLARIFY HER STORY, DEPARTMENT REFRAINED FROM SPECULATING ABOUT MISS VILLA'S INSISTENCE

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THAT HER FATHER'S RELEASE IS BEING DELAYED BY TORRIJOS

DUE TO POTENTIAL INSURANCE PROBLEM. PER TELCON PAN

SUGGESTED THAT HER FATHER CONTACT CONSULATE IF HE IS HAVING PROBLEMS IN SANTIAGO AND SAID THAT CONSULATE WOULD GET IN TOUCH WITH VILLA'S LAWYER REGARDING HIS LATEST ASSESSMENT OF CASE.

2. ON AUGUST 17 AND 21 DEPARTMENT INFORMALLY ASKED AMBASSADOR GONZALEZ REVILLA IF HE COULD PROVIDE ANY GUIDANCE OR INFORMATION THAT COULD BE USED IN RESPONDING TO MISS VILLA'S RECENT INQUIRIES CONCERNING THE STATUS OF HER FATHER'S CASE. ON AUGUST 21 THE AMBASSADOR SAID THAT HE HAD TALKED "WITH PANAMA" ABOUT THE CASE BUT HAD NO FURTHER INFORMATION TO IMPART. IT IS A MATTER FOR THE COURT TO DECIDE, HE SAID, ADDING THAT HE HAD NO IDEA WHEN THE TRIAL WOULD BE HELD. ASKED IF THERE WAS ANYTHING HOLDING UP A DECISION ON THE VILLA CASE, HE REPLIED THAT HE WAS UNAWARE OF ANY PROBLEM.

3. DEPARTMENT WOULD APPRECIATE EMBASSY LATEST ASSESSMENT OF VILLA CASE, INCLUDING MISS VILLA'S CLAIM THAT TORRIJOS IS DELAYING HER FATHER'S TRIAL/RELEASE DUE TO POTENTIAL INSURANCE PROBLEM INVOLVING EXPRESS BOATS. IN VIEW OF AMBASSADOR'S RESPONSE TO LOW KEY DEPARTMENT APPROACH ON VILLA CASE, WHAT FURTHER STEPS, IF ANY, WOULD EMBASSY RECOMMEND AT THIS TIME IN PURSUING QUESTION OF VILLA CASE WITH PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS?
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